

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 17, 2011

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. President:

Based on the latest estimates from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Disaster Relief Fund is expected to be exhausted in June, at the very beginning of the hurricane season. A minimum of \$1.565 billion is needed just to meet the costs of eligible projects for the balance of this fiscal year. This shortfall is largely the result of past catastrophic and major disasters, such as Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav, and Ike, the Midwest floods of 2008, and the Tennessee floods of 2010.

There are currently 49 States that are recovering from major disasters that you have declared under the Robert T. Stafford Act. All of these recovery efforts would be put on hold if FEMA is forced to stop disaster payments. Last year, FEMA was forced to stop such payments for five months, delaying recovery and increasing costs across the Nation. We should not allow history to repeat itself.

Further complicating this funding problem is the imminent onset of the flood season. The National Weather Service is projecting that the country is at risk of, "moderate to major flooding this spring", particularly in the Midwest. The tragic events in Japan have reminded us of the potential consequences of a catastrophic disaster. In responding to a catastrophic disaster such as Hurricane Katrina, the current Disaster Relief Fund balance would be exhausted in three days.

In the absence of an emergency supplemental request from you, the House Republican Leadership decided to include an additional \$1.565 billion of non-emergency funding for the Disaster Relief Fund in H.R. 1. In order to pay for this shortfall, H.R. 1 reduces funding for the Coast Guard, FEMA, and State and local first responders and emergency managers, the very agencies that are responsible for preparing for and responding to future disasters. It is true that in these tough economic times, it is critical that we make disciplined funding decisions, but it makes no sense to strip agencies of the resources they need to prepare for future disasters in order to pay for the costs of past disasters. This problem only gets worse next year. FEMA estimates the additional shortfall in FY 2012 to be \$3 billion.

We simply cannot return to the days when FEMA could not do its job. Therefore, we ask you to submit, without delay, a request for emergency supplemental funding. H.R. 1, as it passed

the House, contains \$159 billion of emergency funding for Overseas Contingencies because the Department of Defense cannot absorb the cost of the wars within its base budget. Similarly, the Department of Homeland Security cannot absorb the costs of catastrophic disasters in its base budget.

Funding shortfalls in the Disaster Relief Fund with an emergency designation is consistent with past practice, by Democrats and Republicans alike. Since 1992, \$110 billion out of \$128 billion appropriated to the DRF has been emergency spending, primarily for Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav, and Ike, and 9/11. In your budget estimates, you have included an allowance for disaster costs, a responsible recognition of the potential costs of disasters. However, absent an emergency supplemental request, this allowance is nothing more than an unfilled promise to communities recovering from disasters.

We thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Wendell L. Ford

Whitman

Tom Harkin

Dianne Feinstein

Al Franken

Jon Kyl

Ben Ray

Lin Swick  
Jack Reed  
Kent Conrad

Ang Klobuchar

Frank R. Lautenberg

Ron Wyden

Jay Byrnes

Senator Mary Landrieu  
Senator Sheldon Whitehouse  
Senator Tom Harkin  
Senator Dianne Feinstein  
Senator Al Franken  
Senator Joe Lieberman  
Senator Barbara Boxer

Senator Richard Durbin  
Senator Jack Reed  
Senator Kent Conrad  
Senator Amy Klobuchar  
Senator Frank Lautenberg  
Senator Ron Wyden  
Senator Jay Rockefeller